

## VOTE - Voter Outreach Through Education Washington Secretary of State

### WASHINGTON STATE CURRICULUM GRADES 8-12

#### TEACHER: LESSON 6

#### THEME: MAKING YOUR POINT, ASKING YOUR QUESTION

*"I am only one; but still I am one. I cannot do everything, but still I can do something; I will not refuse to do the something I can do."*  
(Helen Keller)

*"Never doubt that a small group of committed citizens can make a difference; indeed, it is the only thing that has."*  
(Margaret Mead)

Casting an informed vote is one key ingredient of maintaining our democracy. There is yet another. There are those times when a citizen needs to ask a question of, or express an opinion to, an elected official. This activity will help facilitate student efforts to keep connected with those who represent them in government so that collectively we can have the "consent of the governed" envisioned in the Declaration of Independence. We must do our part AFTER the election, too. One of the most common regrets expressed by elected officials, at all levels, is that their constituents, those they represent, do not regularly convey their wishes or opinions.

#### ACTIVITY:

Students will need access to the Internet. You will need to reproduce enough copies of the lesson for each student and decide if they are to do this as an individual assignment or a collaborative one. There is an optional assignment at the end of this lesson.

Student Lesson Six will:

1. Present some tips and resources on how to keep connected with officials and the "body politic" between elections.
2. Direct students to visit those resources.
3. Ask students to answer some questions. The questions and answers are listed below.

You should explain to students the meaning of two terms on their lesson, "constituent" and "body politic." The first refers to a person represented by an elected official. The second comes from the Mayflower Compact, 1620 ("...combine ourselves together into a civil body politic, for our better ordering and preservation...") referring to forming a government.

#### QUESTIONS:

1. What is the phone number for each office of the two U.S. Senators?
2. What is the number of your state legislative district?
3. What are the names of your state legislative district's two State Representatives and one State Senator?
4. What is the mailing address in Olympia AND email address for the State Senator from your district? (Hint: Click on the name of your State Senator to find this information.)
5. What is the name and contact address (email or postal) of one of your county's elected leaders (council or commission members?)

#### ANSWERS:

1. Depends on which US Senators are currently in office. Students must follow directions in the activity to find out current information. There are many offices for each Senator.
2. Answer depends on which state legislative district the student lives in.
3. Answer depends on which state legislative district the student lives in.
4. Answer depends on which state legislative district the student lives in.
5. Depends on the county in which the student lives in.

A final activity listed below is an option for you to consider. It is not addressed on Student Lesson Six so you would need to explain the directions. It is designed to apply the theme of this lesson and the knowledge gained through it. Specifically, it tasks students to communicate with an elected official on an issue of their choice. They can then apply their citizenship, contact information, communication and writing skills in one activity.

Suggested parameters for this solo activity are as follows:

1. Students should think of an issue that they feel needs to be addressed, from city concerns to international issues that affect our nation. Allow them to write in support as well as opposition on a particular issue or policy.
2. Each student is to type a personal letter to an individual in government; suggest that they back it up on computer/disk in case you require some changes. Direct them to apply the suggestions on their Student Lesson Six, entitled "Writing to Elected Officials." They are encouraged to have another student perform "peer editing" with their draft form of the letter. You may want to set a first-step due date so that all drafts are ready for such an editing activity in class.
3. Each student should be reminded to sign the letters and put a return address in the letter as well as on the envelope.
4. Ask students to turn in letters with a stamped, addressed, legal-size envelope. The letter should be folded and placed inside the unsealed envelope so you can review, evaluate and record the letters before sending them.

Emphasize that you will be sending the letters upon their completion; this helps to provide the catalyst for student "buy in" to the need for substance and quality in their communication with their officials.

You may also want to extend the option of writing a "Letter to the Editor" for a local newspaper in lieu of writing to an official. The same parameters would apply but direct them instead to apply the suggestions under "Writing to newspapers" listed in the student activity sheet.